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AUTHOR Steele, Marilyn
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ABSTRACT

The basic assumption of this paper is that unused and underused public school buildings are appropriate facilities to become opportunity centers for neighborhood citizens of all ages. A detailed case study of a community education program in Grand Rapids, Michigan, illustrates this assumption, and a brief historical summary of changing population statistics documents the enrollment decline. The description of community education in Grand Rapids details uses of empty classrooms, alternative offerings in adult education, leisure activities, a factory-based industrial program, and the use of related community facilities for educational purposes. A budget summary of the Grand Rapids program is included in Appendix A. (Author)

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# Declining Enrollments: Problem or Opportunity?

Speech
107th Annual Convention
American Association of School Administrators
Dallas, Texas
February 22, 1975

EA 007 317



Marilyn Steele, Ph. D.
Director, Planning Services
C. S. Mott Foundation

Abstract: Marilyn Steele

Declining Enrollments: Problem or Opportunity?

Speech: 107th Annual Convention,
American Association of School Administrators,
February 22, 1975

The basic assumption of the speech is that unused and underused public school buildings are appropriate facilities and locations to become opportunity centers for use by neighborhood citizens of all ages with Community Education programs. A detailed case study of community education in Grand Rapids, Michigan illustrates the assumption. A brief historical summary of changing population statistics documents the enrollment decline. The description of community education in Grand Rapids details uses of empty classrooms, alternative offerings in adult education, leisure time activities, the factory-based industrial program, and the use of related community facilities for educational purposes. A summary of the budget is included.

## Declining Enrollments: Problem or Opportunity?

### The Problem

The enrollment boom is over. After twenty years of too many kids, too few classrooms and not enough teachers, with the spectre that taxpayers may be paying off construction bond issues in the next 20 years for now empty classrooms, administrators and school boards are faced with some sobering questions.

What will happen to us when there aren't enough students to keep the building open?

What will we do with our tenured staff?

How will the community react to empty school buildings?

Where will we get the money to maintain our present programs?

From 1800 when the average family had seven children, there has been a decline to 1970 when the average family size was down to three.[1] The number of elementary pupils has been decreasing since 1970, the year when elementary enrollments declined by 200,000.[2] The national birthrate has fallen to an all-time low of 1.9 children per woman.[3] Secondary school enrollments will peak this year and we can expect a continuing decline in K-12 enrollments until 1980 when elementary enrollments will rise again slightly.[4] Thus, from a period of a booming economy, a throw-away-prone society, an increasing population, we are suddenly faced with the shocking reality that the hey-day is over; the unemployment rate is 8 percent nationally (14% in my home town) planned parenthood appears to be here to stay, there's an undersupply of kids and an oversupply of classrooms. And what are we doing to do about it?

The Opportunity

From feast to famine is not new to industrial Michigan because we faced a comparable situation 40 years ago in Flint, when Frank Manley, the young physical education director, viewed the empty classrooms of summertime as an opportunity to open up the schools and use the playgound and buildings to provide safe recreation for the children and the adults of the community. From a concept that the community school was an extended school day primarily for play time and leisure activities, we are into the new generation of the 70's when the school is viewed as the opportunity center for the individual to fulfill her/his potential through learning.

The traditional view of public education concentrates on children ages 5 to 17, the age group with the currently decreasing numbers. We accept readily the responsibility to educate every child as their universal right because they are our most precious possession and the goal of most parents is that the children will enjoy a better life than theirs. Thus few dispute the concept of universal free elementary education which had its advent in America in the early 19th century, but whose origin in Western civilization can be traced to the early Greeks, who believed that leaders of the state were responsible for educating all citizens in the virtues (women were counted with the slaves). Education is nevertheless viewed as the pathway to personal and national improvement and those nations whose citizens are ill-housed, ill-clothed and

facing starvation are also illiterate.

The philosophy of human equality is the heritage of our Judeo-Christian faith which was translated for us by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence with the words, "All men are created equal." Yet equality for the individual has been elusive these two centuries since, for while we give lip-service to the documents now housed in our National Archives Building, we are a group-oriented society, categorized by sex, by race, by ethnic and religious ties, and further stratified by economic caste. We can only hope to achieve equality through a system of Community Education that provides for a lifetime of learning alternatives that range from cognitive mastery of the basics to the avocational pursuits of a leisure-time society of adults, including the elderly. Nearly all eligible children ages 5 to 17 are enrolled in school, some 87%. This academic achievement is a twentieth century success, an increase of about ten percent in the last 50 years.[5] However, the older the age group of each decennial census the lower the average years of school completion. Many adults in our society are hungry for an education. We are a certificate happy nation. Job opportunity is limited by degrees: high school diplomas, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees. And Christopher Jencks' statistics on Inequality notwithstanding, every national census provides evidence of the correlation between education and income. Thus, there are 16 million Americans in the age group 20-24 but some 90 million between 25-64.[6] In 1970 there were more than 12 million adults 65 to 74 and almost 8 million who were over 75.[7] These 110

million American adults are potential learners in our nation's schools. Among them are the adults with special needs, the former school dropouts, those who seek college and graduate degrees and adults who want occupational training or employees who need retraining. Still other adults have hobbies and cultural pursuits as their leisure time increases. Our communities' schools can provide the opportunity for each of us to actualize the dreams of equality through self-fulfillment. Your schools can satisfy that dream for the most highly motivated learners--the mature student whose learning may be a combination of few years of formal school but many years of experience, which John Stuart Mill and later John Dewey equated as education. As you face the problem of declining numbers of young learners, you can fill your empty classrooms with adults who are the growing age group in our society thanks to increasing life expectancy. The pains and frustration of change from "Future Shock" can be eased through lifelong learning.

Grand Rapids, Michigan: A Case Study

Grand Rapids, Michigan, has become a model consortium of lifelong learning where everyone goes to school. Grand Rapids Community Schools provides the entry for pre-schoolers, children, teenagers and adults--for more education in technical schools, community college, Grand Valley State College and graduate programs of three universities.[8] A linkage system to provide easy access from one educational system to another has been formalized by University Consortium Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Over the last three years

the average decline of about 4 percent K-12 enrollments have been more than offset by an increasing number of full-time equated adults. Their 1972 regular K-12 enrollment of 32,503 decreased by 2375 to 30,128 in 1974. At the same time fulltime adult and alternative education teenagers rose from 974 in 1972 to 2812 in 1974, a gain of 1838 or 65% over the three year period.

The actual use of empty school space is illustrated between 1969-1974 when a total of 60 classrooms were used as follows for alternative education centers, pre-kindergarten and Follow-Through classrooms, a Fine Arts Center, a Day Care Center and a Latin American Center. This year Grand Rapids Public Schools are using 581 classrooms but they have an excess of 34 classrooms spread throughout 20 schools. Only one of these 34 extra rooms is presently unassigned.

In addition to the school-based programs, the amazing growth of Community Education over the last three years has created a demand for instructional space outside of the school buildings. One hundred thirty-eight Community Education Centers are spread throughout the community, in 36 schools and in 102 other found spaces. These include

5 churches

4 hospitals

36 industries

11 rest homes

6 Senior Citizen Centers

36 additional locations

Three cooperating public school districts for which Grand Rapids provides staff and operates programs, reverse the typical urban flight to better schools in the suburbs. This urban district delivers Community Education from the city to the suburbs.

Their Community Education directory suggests the range of programs offered. In addition to adult basic education, adult high school completion and alternative education, there is

Adult driver education--including driver education for Spanish Speaking people.

Two career education/job skills programs for adults in area skill centers.

An ex-offenders program for parolees and probationers at one center including the jail.

Offered in leisure time classes are

Know Your Automobile for Men and Women

Antique identification

Beer Can Art

Dog Obedience

Conversational Dutch

Electricity for Homeowners

Metric System

Snowmobile Repair

Wig Care and Styling

Astrology

Powder Puff Mechanics

Modern Novel

Preparing for a European Experience

Income Tax Preparation

Adult Band - pick up your old instruments and begin playing in a band

Arabic Language and Culture

Herb Craft

Women's Self Defense

Practical Consumer Finance

Small Business Management

Community Problem Solving

Geneology

Especially for Brides and Bridesmaids

Silversmithing

Philosophy for Effective Living

Greek Cooking

Polish Heritage

People Problems - How and Why?

Amateur Radio

Micro Wave Oven

History of Rock and Roll

Coping with Retirement

Bread Dough Art

Belly Dancing

T. A. Transactional Analysis

Terrariums

Weaving

Yoga[9]

Grand Rapids Community Schools offer classes on site in 36 different industrial plants. Included among the nationally known factories are

American Seating

Amway Corporation

Bissell

Colonial Clock

Dexter Locks

General Motors Diesel

General Motors Fisher Body

Herman Miller

Keeler Brass

Kelvinator

Lear Siegler

Oliver

Rapistan

Steel Case

and Wolverine Brass. [11]

Industrially-based classes are always taught in two sections by the same teacher, before a shift begins and between shifts. This permits a student to transfer sections if his shift is changed. Factory-based classes include such courses as

Fundamental Shop Mechanics

Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry for Tradesmen

Blueprint Reading

Electric Motor Controls

Fundamental Industrial Electronics

Welding - Arc and Acetylene

Hydraulics

In addition industrial students can enroll in ABE, high school completion, GED. This year third year college students who completed Associate Degrees in factory-site community college classes are enrolled in third year college and university factory-site classes.

Among our nation's most forgotten citizens are the aging residents of veterans' homes, handicapped victims of America's wars of the 20th century. Many of these same classes are available in the Veteran's Home. The offender's program operates a jail program for confined adults or those recently released from jail of prison. Some 250 offenders are served in six locations. A Babysitting Clinic is offered for students aged 12 to 16. Preparation for Retirement discusses "Your Second Career," "Retirement Income and Its Management," "Planning for Retirement Residence," and "Health and Medical Care in Retirement."

Some 2,000 Grand Rapids citizens are in the Golden Age Club whose membership entitles them to participation in any community school program free of charge.

Classes are held for the home-bound or hospital based for the physically impaired. This includes victims of multiple schlerosis, blindness, post polio, cerebral palsy, back injuries, kidney failure, stroke patients--for whom basic communication is taught . Persons in the hospital kidney dialysis unit attend classes twice weekly while they are on the kidney machine. Students working toward high school completion can receive co-op credit for jobs, for passing life experience and homemakers tests.

Last year 25 adult students seeking high school degrees were taught in their own homes in the Roving Teacher Program. This year there are 400 enrolled.

The Community Schools offer bus trips-- Theater and Shopping Trips to Chicago; a flower and garden show; for art lovers, the Ann Arbor May Festival with Eugene Ormondy; there are Ski Weekends and Bicycle Trips.

In addition safety classes are held in snowmobiling, boating and gun safety.

A food coop is held twice weekly and a community garden plot is plowed and cultivated in the spring and water is available on site. All the city farmer has to do is plant, weed and harvest. Finally, Michigan Blue Shield Health Insurance sponsored a new program on television called "Operation Second Chance," in a 12 week 60 program series designed to prepare the student in the five subject areas of

the GED test. Three paperback books available by mail serve as texts and monthly GED tests are scheduled at the local community college.

The following information demonstrates the tremendous growth of the Grand Rapids Community Education Department from 1971 to the 1974-75 school year.

| Programs | 1972-73 | 1973-74 | 1974-75 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leisure Time Students | 9,581 | 12,219 | 14,000* |
| After School Students | 3,000 | 4,350 | 5,250 |
| Golden Age Applications | 1,000 | 1,500 | 1,800 |
| Additional Services | 3,500 | 7,600 | 9,000 |
| Total Population Serviced | 24,629 | 36,472 | 42,830 |
| % Growth | 88% | 48% | 17% |
| Staff | | | |
| Teachers, Aides, Secretaries | 375 | 570 | 779 |
| Administrators | 13 | 15 | 23 |

## Declining/Increasing Student Enrollment, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972-1974

K-12 Enrollment Loss, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972-1974

| | 1972 | 1973 | %- | 1974 | %- | 3 Year Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary | 17,706 | 16,621 | | 16,071 | | |
| Secondary | 14,797 | 14,634 | | 14,057 | | |
| Total | 32,503 | 31,255 | | 30,128 | | 2,375 |
| Loss | | 1,248 | 4 | 1,127 | 4 | |

Community Education Enrollment Gain, 1972-1974

| | | | %+ | | %+ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative Education | 302 | 339 | | 481 | | |
| Adult FTE* | 672 | 1,392 | | 2,331 | | |
| Total | 974 | 1,731 | 78 | 2,812 | 38 | 1,685 |
| Net Gain | | 483 | | 1,685 | | 437 |

Every enrollee has a different life drama. One graduate from last year, Mrs. Elizabeth Battaglia, fulfilled her life's ambition by completing three years of high school in one year. She received credit for life experience and work experience by passing tests and enrolling full time. A sixteen year old high school dropout, Mrs. Battaglia, husband, two sons and daughter were smiling proudly when she received her diploma. This year she is a freshman in community college and some of her poetry has been published by Ladies Home Journal.[10]

The symbol of community education in Grand Rapids is Ginny Schmitt, a pretty blonde, blue-eyed girl who serves as Community Secretary. All of the brochures, handouts and bulletins display her picture with the caption for information about Community Education, "Call Ginny" and the phone number. Her name and face appear on billboards and theater marquees. Her voice is heard on radio spots. She was featured in Community Education displays in shopping malls. She gives the information on the operation Second Chance GED television series. But Ginny and her boss knew that Ginny was a local celebrity when they drove up to the Mall before their display opened and there blazoned on all three marquee signs were three words "Ginny Is Here!"

Education for adults is more than promotional stunts, belly dancing, community gardens or learning in a kidney dialysis unit. In addition to providing opportunity for individuals to keep reaching toward fulfillment of their human potential, community schools provide the base for citizens to become involved

in decision-making to improve the quality of life in their own communities. The revised organization chart for Flint, Michigan illustrates the integration of Community Education into the main line relationship with the Flint Board of Education. Every elementary principal is designated as the community leader. Every elementary community school director assists the elementary principal and reports to the Director of Elementary Education. The elementary attendance area has been identified as the geographic base for citizen participation in Community School Advisory Councils which are involved in Community Needs Assessment, Goal-setting, Priorities and Annual Program Evaluation and Review. Principals work with their Advisory Councils as the Superintendent works with the Board of Education. Each Council is represented on a Central Coordinating Council who reflect community concerns, wants and needs to the Board of Education.

The Mini-City Hall Project conceptualized by former Mayor John Lindsay in New York City, was implemented by Mayor Kevin White in 18 decentralized locations in Boston. This model has been implemented again in 20 of the 41 elementary schools in Flint with one community service representative assigned to an average of two elementary attendance areas located at one of the two designated schools, linking City Hall to the community and to the school. The

Exhibit "A"
Basic Cabinet, Flint, Michigan
1974-75

city representative serves as an ombudsman for citizen complaints including all city services: garbage collection, street repairs, lights, sewers, housing code enforcement, vandalized houses, and abandoned automobiles. Water bills and city taxes can be paid there and the CSR's have been trained to provide assistance in filling out income taxes. In the first three days of this new program which began last month, one school recorded 80 citizen contacts, most of them complaints. The program is paid for by local revenue-sharing funds.

The secondary schools in Flint, Michigan, are city wide Special Community Education Program Centers because these buildings provide auditoriums, libraries, gymnasiums, special homemaking and shop facilities, science laboratories, etc. Secondary community school directors report to the Director of Secondary Education.

The problem of finances is always a critical issue. The Grand Rapids case study illustrates that the gain in fulltime equated adult students not only offsets the declining birthrate by providing adults with a second chance, but the revenue from State Aid and fees for services exceeds the budget for Community Education.

Education provides that second chance for the individual who didn't make it for any number of reasons. A poignant story was told by Diana Miller, a housewife in Lakewood, Ohio at the Lakewood Adult Graduation Ceremony.

Before I returned to school I was very shy and extremely unsure of myself. My husband and family didn't really think I had too much on the ball. The only topics I discussed with them were the children, housekeeping and the baby I wanted. All my husband discussed was his job, golf, why he did not want a fourth child, and motorcycles.

As the year progressed we learned to discuss what I was learning at school. We had many discussions on government and politics, why I wanted a fourth child, history, why he insisted on no more kids, our school system and more on motorcycles.

We became more interested, as a family in our world. We discussed likes and dislikes of our world and our society. We discussed our dreams, goals, and problems more openly.

We became happier as we realized we could change our lives, our laws, and our society. As time passed, Dad became interested in babies while Mom became interested in motorcycles.

. . .

You may say we have failed on one of our goals because we no longer have our baby.

. . .

Danae was born a courageous little girl. The first 6 months of her life were marked by illnesses. . . . Danae had open heart surgery January 23. ...On February 2 she died. You may wonder why I chose to tell you of something so sad, but I believe in impossible dreams.

. . .

If someone had had a bigger dream, had dared to fight a seemingly unbeatable foe, Danae might still be here. ...One man succeeded in surgery, but another failed in a wider field of anesthesiology.

. . .

Only you can decide what success really means and is. Your dream and goals are just as important as your neighbor's. You can beat the unbeatable foe. There is a special key to open just the right door for you and your personal needs. But the key you seek is in the classrooms of your schools. Once you hold the key you will be armed for a final and victorious battle.[11]

Declining K-12 school enrollments are a problem, yes, but they also offer the challenge to concerned, creative and energetic educators to equalize opportunities for the increasing numbers of adults in our society, adults who want to keep on learning and growing and becoming. You may have seen the poster that says "Give me a fish and I can eat for a day; Teach me to fish and I eat for a lifetime."

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Appendix A

## Grand Rapids Community Schools Budget, 1972-1974

| Account | 1972-73 | 1973-74 | 1974-75 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue | | | |
| State Aid | $ 900,000 | $1,949,000 | $5,013,000 |
| Miscellaneous | 100,000 | 350,000 | 800,000 |
| Total | $1,000,000 | $2,299,000 | $5,813,000 |
| Budget | | | |
| Directors' Salaries | $ 136,000 | $ 145,000 | $ 228,000 |
| Teachers' Salaries | 233,000 | 595,000 | 1,186,000 |
| Security Salaries | | 24,000 | 29,000 |
| Secretarial Salaries | 12,000 | 29,000 | 70,000 |
| Total Salaries | $ 381,000 | $ 793,000 | $1,513,000 |
| Contracted Services | $ 46,500 | $ 56,000 | $ 190,000 |
| Textbooks | 3,500 | 15,500 | 40,000 |
| Instructional Materials | 7,000 | 13,200 | 25,000 |
| Instructional Supplies | | 4,000 | 1,200 |
| Office Supplies | 5,850 | 4,000 | 5,500 |
| Miscellaneous Supplies | 2,750 | 1,250 | 600 |
| Mileage Reimbursement | 3,950 | 4,250 | 7,500 |
| Conference and Convention | 1,000 | 1,200 | 2,800 |
| Rental Expenses | 2,200 | 11,250 | 14,000 |
| Matching Contribution | | 156,332 | 295,000 |
| Miscellaneous Expenses | 18,750 | 20,000 | 55,000 |
| In-Service Community Schools | -0- | 6,000 | 10,000 |
| Data Processing | | -0- | 10,000 |
| Total Other Expenses | $ 91,500 | $ 292,982 | $ 656,600 |
| Total Community Schools | $ 472,500 | $1,085,982 | $2,169,600 |
| Other Community Services | | | |
| Appropriations | $ 196,100 | $ 240,000 | $ 292,000 |
| Total Community Schools and Services | $ 668,600 | $1,325,982 | $2,461,600 |

Appendix B

Leisure Time Classes,
Grand Rapids Community Education
1974-75

Know Your Automobile for Men and Women
Antique Identification
Beer Can Art
Dog Obedience
Conversational Dutch
Electricity for Homeowners
Metric System
Snowmobile Repair
Wig Care and Styling
Astrology
Powder Puff Mechanics
Modern Novel
Preparing for a European Experience
Income Tax Preparation
Adult Bank - pick up your old instruments and begin playing in a band
Arabic Language and Culture
Herb Craft
Women's Self Defense
Practical Consumer Finance
Small Business Management
Community Problem Solving (which takes place at Our Lady of Sorrow Hall)
Geneology
Especially for Brides and Bridesmaids
Silversmithing
Philosophy for Effective Living
Greek Cooking
Polish Heritage
People Problems - How and Why?
Amateur Radio
Micro Wave Oven
History of Rock and Roll
Coping with Retirement
Bread Dough Art
Belly Dancing
T. A. Transactional Analysis
Terrariums
Weaving
Yoga

Appendix C

Industrial Based Classes
Grand Rapids Community Education
1974-75

American Seating Co.
Amway Corp.
Applied Arts
Bissell, Inc.
Butternut Bread Co.
Canfield
Carbonneau
Colonial Clock
Dependable Engineering Foundry
Dexter Lock Corp.
Doehler-Jarvis
Evans
General Motors Diesel
General Motors Fisher Body #1
General Motors Fisher Body #2
Goodwill Industries
Grand Rapids Die Casting
Herman Miller
Herrud & Co.
John Batts
Johnson Furntiure Co.
Keeler Brass Co. - Godfrey
Keeler Brass Co. - Kentwood
Kelvinator Inc.
Knape & Vogt Co.
Lear Siegler Inc.
Marine Reserve
Naval Reserve
Oliver Co.
Rapistan Corp.
Reynolds Co.
Rospatch
Rowe International Inc.
Sparta Co.
Steelcase Inc.
Wolverine Brass Wks.